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SUBJECT Hearings Begin on the First CIA Charter

SUSAN STAMBERG: Senate hearings begin this week on the first charter for the Central Intelligence Agency. Iran and Afghanistan make the CIA more likely to get what it wants than at any time in recent years. Still, the proposed charter remains highly controversial.

NPR's Alan Burlow has more.

ALAN BURLOW: Everyone in Congress agrees there is a need for a secret agency to collect foreign intelligence. The CIA is viewed as an integral part of this nation's foreign policy, as an essential tool of its military defense, and, increasingly, of its economic defense. At the same time, the history of CIA abuses hasn't been forgotten.

Senator Walter Huddleston of Kentucky is a principal sponsor of the recently proposed charter.

SENATOR WALTER HUDDLESTON: I know that some headlines are going to say that we're going to permit spying on American citizens, innocent American citizens.

BURLOW: According to Senate Intelligence Chairman Birch Bayh, fundamental constitutional rights of speech, press, assembly, and privacy are at stake in writing a charter. And the charter debate may prove a classic confrontation between those defending our national security interests and those defending the constitutional rights of Americans.

SENATOR HUDDLESTON: While we do, in fact, permit spying on an innocent American, I think you can see that, under